



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

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Send Your Kids Back to School With Good Health

Whether with dread or anticipation, your kids are probably counting the days 'til they go back to school.

We'd like to help ensure that your children's school experience enriches their health as well as their intellect.

Get Immunized

Local retail stores have been gleefully reminding us for weeks that this time of year means new shoes, lunchboxes, and school supplies. This is also a good time to review your children's vaccination records to make sure they're up to date.

If you have a child entering kindergarten or seventh grade, proof of certain immunizations is required by state law. For the best health protection, additional shots are recommended.

New kindergarteners must have booster doses of DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis), polio, and MMR (measles, mumps, rubella). Shots for chicken pox and hepatitis A are also recommended.

Students entering the seventh grade must have a second dose of MMR and a tetanus booster (which also protects against diphtheria and pertussis).

As kids get older, they can develop risks for other diseases. Health professionals recommend that pre-teens and teenagers be vaccinated against:

- meningitis;
- chicken pox;
- human papillomavirus; and
- hepatitis A and B.

College freshmen or transfer students should check with their school to find out whether they need any specific shots before they attend.

The health department holds walk-in immunization clinics Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 1930 Ninth Ave. You don't need an appointment, but bring a record of any immunizations your child got elsewhere to help speed the process.

The department can bill all insurance providers, but please call your insurance carrier to see what vaccines are covered. If your child is not insured, we have a program that can help make vaccines affordable.

To learn more about immunizations, visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/vaccines/default.htm or contact the health department at 443-2584.

Take the Active Route

Research suggests that physically active kids are more likely to become healthy, physically active adults.

One way you can help your children develop a habit of regular physical activity is to encourage them to walk or bicycle to school whenever possible. It will help them build strong bones, muscles and joints, as well as decrease their risk of obesity. Sedentary kids are more likely to develop chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, cancer and stroke.

This fall, the Helena Safe Routes to School Program hopes to make walking to school safer and more enjoyable by creating "Walking School Buses." Parent volunteers will begin the walk to school with their own children and then stop to pick up others who are part of their "bus" along the way.

To learn more about Walking School Buses or Safe Routes to School, call M.C. Beeby at 406-431-3152.

If your kids need jazzier incentives, sign them up for Walk and Bike to School Month in October. Bike Walk Helena will offer prizes to individuals, teams, and classes that meet mileage challenges. Kids can sign up this fall at www.bikewalkhelena.org.

Omit the Emissions

If you drive your child to school, please use designated pick-up and drop-off zones to avoid exposing schoolkids to your vehicle exhaust. For the same reason, avoid idling your vehicle in school zones.

Vehicle emissions aggravate asthma, allergies, emphysema, and bronchitis. The Environmental Protection Agency has also identified diesel as a probably carcinogen. And children are more sensitive to air pollution because they breathe 50 percent more air per pound of body weight than adults do.

Stuff the Lunchbox

Packing those school lunches can be a chore, but it can also be a chance to encourage healthy eating.

Several studies have found that diet can play a significant role in academic performance. Good nutrition – especially a healthy breakfast – can improve memory and cognitive ability, reduce absenteeism, and improve mood.

An internet search will yield many articles aimed at making breakfast and school lunches nutritious as well as tasty. One great website is Meals Matter, at www.mealsmatter.org. Click on “Articles and Resources” and then “Meal Planning Articles.”

Other good sources for nutrition information and healthy recipes are the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion at www.ChooseMyPlate.gov and the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute at <http://hp2010.nhlbi.nih.gov/healthyeating/>

Only 14 more days ‘til school starts. Just in case you were counting!